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SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN/COUNTERNARCOTICS: UNODC REPORT
ANTICIPATES SIGNIFICANT DECLINE IN OPIUM CULTIVATION

REF: KABUL 179

11. (U) SUMMARY: Kai Eide, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, and Afghan Minister for Counter Narcotics Khodaidad Khodaidad jointly announced the 2009 UN Office of Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) annual Opium Rapid Assessment Survey (ORAS) at a February 1 press conference in Kabul. (ORAS text provided to INL/AP separately.) The report predicts opium poppy cultivation will decrease significantly throughout Afghanistan for the second year in a row, and suggests the number of poppy-free provinces could increase from 18 to 22 this year. In their remarks, Eide and Khodaidad cited the spread of governance and security as one of the major factors contributing to the anticipated decline in cultivation, and called on the international community to support the Good Performers Initiative (GPI), which provides directed development assistance to provinces which succeed in decreasing or eliminating poppy cultivation. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) At a February 1 press conference, held at the Kabul headquarters of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), SRSG Kai Eide and Afghan Minister of Counter Narcotics Khodaidad jointly presented the UNODC's 2009 Opium Rapid Assessment Survey. Both men were upbeat in their presentations, and stressed that this year's survey predicts a significant decrease in poppy cultivation in all regions of Afghanistan (although they were careful not to cite a specific figure.) They also praised the efforts of the Afghan government and the international community in reducing poppy cultivation for the second year in a row. The survey cites three main factors contributing to reduced cultivation in 2009: 1) drought conditions in many parts of the country which make it difficult to grow poppy; 2) lower prices for poppy due to an oversupply of opium in the country; and 3) improved governance and security in many areas as the result of Afghan and coalition activities last year. Jean-Luc Lemahieu, the head of UNODC's Kabul office, also spoke at the event, noting that the survey is conducted throughout Afghanistan using interviews with farmers as an indicator of their intentions to plant poppy and other illicit crops like marijuana. He stressed that the report is only an indicator; further efforts will be needed to ensure the predicted decline in cultivation is realized.

IMPROVED GOVERNANCE HELPS DECREASE POPPY

13. (U) Eide and Khodaidad both stressed that improved governance on the national and provincial levels is a major factor in decreasing poppy cultivation. In 2006 there were six poppy free provinces, in 2007 13, and in 2008 18

provinces. In 2009, the UNODC expects as many as 22 provinces to be poppy free, partly as a result of individual governors taking measures to expand the rule of law, security, and development activity in their provinces. Coordinated support for such measures, especially from the Ministries of Counternarcotics, Interior and Defense, as well as from the Internal Directorate for Local Government (IDLG), is vital to their success. Provinces such as Nangarhar and Helmand, they noted, have very active governors whose efforts should be supported by the international community as well as the Afghan government. In Helmand province, for example, Governor Mangal's 26,000 hectare (ha) Food Zone campaign combines public information, development assistance, and law enforcement (backed by military force) in a coordinated effort to reduce poppy cultivation and expand governance. The early success of this approach has created a backlash by local Taliban and other insurgent groups, which have attacked wheat distribution centers, voter registration centers and are now attacking the U.S.-supported Poppy Eradication Force (PEF) that began eradication in late January. Despite such resistance, UNODC expects poppy cultivation in Helmand to decline significantly this year.

UN SEEKS SUPPORT FOR GOOD PERFORMERS INITIATIVE

14. (U) Eide, Khodaidad, and Lemahieu lauded the Good Performers Initiative (GPI) during the press conference, and called on international donors to provide tangible support to the program. The GPI provides up to USD 10 million in targeted development assistance to provinces which have

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either reduced poppy cultivation by more than 10 percent or become completely poppy free. The program is currently funded entirely by the U.S. (State/INL) and UK (FCO) governments, and is administered by the MCN working closely with provincial governors. As the MCN uses UNODC eradication verification figures as the basis for rewards, a significant decrease in cultivation will create additional demand for funds; Eide and Khodaidad encouraged potential donor countries to consider participating in the program. (Note: UNAMA and NAS Kabul are preparing material to share with potential donors countries about the program.)

COMMENT:

15. (U) The 2009 ORAS survey predicts a significant decrease in poppy cultivation but does not provide a firm number. The actual size of any decrease will not be clear until the UNODC publishes its final report in August, after the current growing season is over. Drought conditions, lower opium prices, and better governance are all factors in the probable decrease this year. While weather and opium prices cannot be accurately predicted each year, improved governance, security, and targeted development are the key to sustaining such reductions over time. Experience in provinces such as Nangarhar, Badakhshan, and, this year, Helmand, demonstrate clearly that when farmers know their government leaders will enforce the law -- including by eradicating illicit crops when necessary -- they are less likely to cultivate poppy. Providing timely and visible rewards to provinces choosing to grow less poppy also helps convince potential growers that their long-term interests are better served through legitimate activities.

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